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THE WORKING PEOPLE OF LOWELL
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
MARY BLEWETT/MARTHA MAYO

INFORMANT: ESTHER ALFANO
INTERVIEWER: PAUL PAGE
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E = ESTHER
P = PAUL

Tape 85.27

E: When they were in Ireland they couldn't, they could live in their houses, but they never could own the land.

[Tape is turned off, then on again]

P: So. Well anyways (laughs). I think it will fit. [Must be discussing the tape recorder]
So you were saying that your mother hated the English.

E: The English, with a passion.

P: Why was that?

E: Because they gave them such a hard time when she lived in Ireland. They couldn't own their land, they were heavily taxed. Soldiers would come in, search the house for weapons, you know? Practically throw them out of their beds. Although she had a good education. The school master come to the house and would teach them, because they use to have cross what they called was the bog, and sometimes you know, it wasn't passable. And so to the day she died she hated the English. If they're any where she is now, she still hates them.

P: [Both laugh] They're probably not there.

E: She won't stay if they're there. [Both laugh]

P: Did you have any brothers that (--) Did you have brothers that survived?

E: No, they all died when they were young.

P: I know in some families, I don't know if it's true for the Irish, but some families the mother wanted someone to go into the priesthood let's say.

E: They did on Clare Street. Every kid that graduated from school went away to be a brother or a priest. Within a year they would all be back again. (P: Laughs) Or a nun. Oh it was a great honor to have one of them go away. And a lot of them were forced into it that never really should have gone at all. It's a calling you have to have. It isn't something that you can work at.

P: No it isn't, no really, but it's a problem. It's like anything else, you have to (--) You either, you can either do it (--) You can either (--) It's either what you're suppose to do, or it's not. There's no in between.

E: No, you'd have to have the (--) I never talked any of mine into being that. If they wanted to be in, they could be in. (Unclear laughing).

P: You didn't have any sons though?

E: [Unclear], her husband.

P: That's how you have a sister-in-law. (Both laugh)

E: (Lots of laughing-any conversation unclear) He's the youngest.

P: So what did they end up doing? Are they still, are they working?

E: Yah, he's a cement finisher and does all kinds of, and does a lot of work on his own. (P: Yah) Plastering and (--)

P: Well that's a good job. That's a good occupation to have now in the city. I wish I did.

E: Yah, he has, it's a very good trade he has.

Unknown voice: How much longer do you have to go?

P: I'm going to be graduating this year. Yah, then I'll probably go to graduate school somewhere.

Unknown voice: Same thing?

P: Same political science, philosophy. I don't want to be a politician. I'm not a politician.

Unknown voice: No, no, I know.

P: There's a difference in a way. Some people are meant to be politicians, but for the most part they're sort of despicable people. [Laughs] And then other people are more interested in probably social issues, public issues, public policies.

Unknown voice: That's right.

P: Like transportation, health services, education. And they're a better lot I think, than politicians. That's why in the history of this country the politicians have seemed to be sort of corrupt for one reason or the other. That's why when I asked the question about in the Irish, whether you expect, not the Irish specifically, but whether you expect or your parents expected something in return for their vote, that why should I vote for so and so if I can vote for someone else and he'll, I'll be guaranteed a job?

E: No, I don't ever remember them ever talking about politics like that. It was always very crooked even then.

Unknown voice: Some of the Irish did though in Boston, like look at Hurley.

E: And they did here in Lowell too. We had ones you know, that their relatives were in the City Hall, and the truck would be back up, and they'd be getting flour and all sorts of things from the city.

P: But no one could do anything about that?

E: Nobody would say anything about it, you know? Oh, and there was a lot of graft even then. Now the Mayor lived right next door to us, and we never, never thought to even ask a favor of him.

P: Maybe, you know (--) Did you hear of any, do you remember any stories in the past of corruption in the city?

E: Yah, but I ain't going to tell them! [Laughs]

Unknown voice: [Laughing] Just don't name names!

E: I mean there are people still living today that's related to them, you know? They were really [whispers] (--)

P: Without naming names, could you just (--) I don't think there's any way to pin point people, (E: No) what the circumstance was.

E: No, it's just that they were, well we have them right here now, that you know, handing out favors and (--)

P: I don't think (--) Maybe we shouldn't say anything. I've been in other interviews where, well this one man, he um, what's the name of it? Past Temp, the Past Temp Club, Past Temp?

Unknown Voice: The Past Time.

P: Yah, in Centreville there? (E: Yes) Near Archambault Towers? (E: Yes) He was just saying how a lot, he knew a lot of corruption that would go on, because a lot of the social clubs, the politicians would visit them. And if the politicians wanted the vote from the French people, they would have to do something for the club let's say.

E: That's right. Do something about their taxes. Some of them don't even pay their taxes, don't have to pay. (P: Um, yah) Other ones, the one that I know, she's in the housing. And she had only just applied for it, and there was 241 people ahead of her, and she was put right in through politics, with all them other people that had been waiting for so long. It's only a small thing, but to me it's rotten.

P: Do you remember any, if the Irish had community clubs, organizations?

E: Yah, they use to have the Broadway Social Club down on Broadway. And ah, but I mean they just hung out there, it was no big (--) They didn't ever do anything that I ever remember. It was just a club for the members.

P: Men and women?

E: Just men.

Unknown voice: Most of men stay bachelors.

E: Most of the Irish men, they don't marry very young. I mean a lot of them don't even marry at all, especially in Ireland. They like to go down to the Pub and sit there. I know they drink warm beer. That sounds (--) That don't sound right, [Laughs] so it would be that hot, but they (--) I had bet not too long ago that it would become extinct.

P: What's this?

Unknown voice: Warm beer, or? [Laughs]

E: Because the men never married.

P: The Irish people.

E: An awful lot of Irish people don't marry.

P: I was going to ask you that question. [Laughs] Where did the Irish come from then?

E: Yah, the Irish men. Yah. I know a half a dozen friends of mine have children, boys, and they're in their forties now and they're not married.

P: So you were saying that you know how to speak Gaelic somewhat, and that your mother would speak Gaelic to?

E: When she had company so we wouldn't know what they were talking about.

P: So you wouldn't know?

E: But you, and you eventually pick it up, you know, when they say different things, and they keep saying it, you know, well now that's just what that means.

P: (Laughs)

E: And you know, when you'd go down and get your teeth pulled out, they would, they never gave you nothing, you know, no novacaine, no nothing. They just put the pliers in your mouth and out it came. It almost killed you. [P: laughs] I can remember I had to get a bad tooth out. It was awful, oh, and it had ached for two weeks. He kept putting (--) His name was Dr. Avalon. And he kept putting his finger in and he'd say, "Is it that one?" And I'd say, "Yes, it's that one." Then he'd put his finger in again, "Is it that one?" [P: laughing] And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Are you sure?" When he put the finger in the third time I bit him so hard that I drew the blood. And he said to my mother, "I'm, gonna pull it anyway no matter if it's that one or not!" [Laughs]

P: You mustn't have gone to the hospital that often then?

E: No, and the hospital was a corporation hospital. The mills owned it.

P: So what did that mean?

E: So when you worked in the mill it didn't cost you anything to go up to the hospital. And they sold it to St. Joseph's just like for a dollar.

P: They sold it to the nuns?

E: Yah, St. Joseph's Hospital.

Unknown voice: How much was the room? (E: Huh?) How much was the room?

E: Yah, when Rita was born it was a corporation hospital. That's the oldest one. She's almost sixty. Ah, it cost \$12.00 for the room, private room.

P: A week, not day.

E: Twelve dollars a week, and you didn't have to pay anything for the baby. Then afterwards they began to charge like three or four dollars a week for the baby, and I don't know how much it is now. Twelve dollars week for a private room.

P: Lot of things to talk about I guess. (E: Yah) Well we've talked a lot. I think we've covered quite a lot of topics. Let's see.

E: The depot at one time use to be down at Towers Corner, somewhere down in through there.

P: The train depot?

E: That's what they say, years and years ago, or somewhere down at Towers Corner.

P: You mentioned before that the Irish had helped to build the canals?

E: The men come and dug them by hand.

P: They lived here though?

E: They lived here and they settled in the Acre. There was no houses for them. So they built like shanties down by, along side of the canal, but the Yankees that would come down and knock them down at night. So they'd have big clubs. Not guns, or knives, or anything like that, clubs. Of course the Irish would get their clubs, and they'd hear that, and they'd have a wing ding on an affair down there.

P: This was before your (--)

E: That was before my time. (P: Yah) I always heard them talk about it afterwards. And of course there's quite a few books out about it.

P: I wonder why, why would the Yankees do that to the people who were building their (--)

E: They didn't want the Irish here.

P: Who was going to build the canals? [Laughs]

E: I don't imagine they even wanted the mills. (P: Hm) Because of course they had big estates then. They'd go like from Belvidere right down to the river.

P: Rogers probably. The Rogers had a big estate.

E: They lived on Andover Street.

P: Yah. Well they still have. I think that's part of Shedd Park, isn't (--).

E: No, I don't think so. I don't know who (--) Somebody donated that.

P: Nourse. Who is it? Edith Rogers Nourse.

E: Edith Rogers Nourse, yes.

Unknown voice: Edith Nourse Rogers.

P: Yah, that Rogers house. Yah.

E: Edith Nourse Rogers, yah. I don't know whether they are the ones that gave the Shedd Park to the city of Lowell. They're not allowed to build on it. They never even should have built that school there. It was given to the city of Lowell, that park. One time there use to be bears there. Two moth eaten looking ones they were. They were at the top of Shedd Park. But there wasn't (--) The kids made their own entertainment. You know, skating was a big thing, and sliding.

P: How much did the skates cost?

E: Only a couple of dollars. And you (--) They were clamps, and you'd clamp them on your shoes. They weren't shoe skates. You just clamped them on your shoe. And everybody had sleds, and you'd go sliding. Because there was no automobiles, you could slide on any of the streets. We use to slide down school street, right across Pawtucket Street.

P: Toward the river. [All laughing] Was that bridge there? Was there always a bridge there?

E: Almost to the bridge, or you could go from Mt. Vernon Street, and you could go down Bowers Street right down almost to the North Common. Cross all them streets and never had a worry in the world.

P: Did you even hear of people getting hurt building these canals, or dying from it? Falling in the river, or (--)

E: No, no I never heard of any accidents. Years ago there use to be an apple tree, and it was on the canal in back of where we lived. And the apple tree leaned over the canal. And the kids use to go there in the summertime and pick the apples, and they'd drown. Nobody from Clare Street ever drowned there, but the kids from down the lower end of Broadway would come up, until somebody had brains enough after awhile to cut the apple tree down. But a lot of people died in the (--) A lot of kids drowned in that canal. Every summer at least two would drown there.

Unknown voice: And there was a flood too, wasn't there, that went down in that year (unclear)?

E: Yah, but that was in thirty-five. Thirty-five the big flood. Of course it flooded Pawtucketville too.

P: Hm. What, did it affect you at all, your house?

E: No. It come up to the wall, but it didn't affect the, it didn't come on to the road or anything, cause that's down low and the houses (--) I imagine that land must have been filled in, and then the houses built on it, cause it didn't reach up that high. Of course that's what saved the city that time, the Francis Gate. That's where it is, half way up Broadway. They called it Francis Folly, because they said he was a fool to build it, that would never save the city. And I think that he had something to do with the mills too.

P: Yah, I think they were one of the first, you know, the group of men.

E: He went to England. Now I think he's the one that went to England and seeing these machines they had for spinning and weaving in the cotton mills, and without even writing anything down he memorized it in his own mind, and came back and built the machines.

P: Yah. I don't know if it was him. It was someone. I don't remember who it was. It might be him.

E: I'm pretty sure it was him.

Unknown voice: It wasn't one of the Rogers or something, was it? (E: No) Somebody from Boston? Seems I read something about that [unclear].

P: I know I've read it too, but I just don't know who it was.

E: But ah, he was pretty brilliant. Of course the canals furnished all that water power. For years they could run their looms and everything on just water power. (P: um)

P: And they had cheap labor.

E: Cheap labor, you're not kidding it was cheap. And in the gatehouses, the Locks and Canals, the men had free homes and all they had to do was tend to the locks. There's one there on Broadway, and one just as you're going over the Pawtucket Bridge. There's a house down low on your left hand side.

P: Pawtucket Bridge?

E: You're going over (--) The bridge going over to Pawtucketville.

P: Over which street, Textile?

E: No, coming from School Street, to go over the bridge.

P: Oh yah, there's the brick house near, off the road, right off, right off the road.

E: It use to be a little yellow wooden house.

Unknown voice: Isn't it? (E: huh?) Isn't it red now?

E: It may be red now, but it use to be yellow, and it would be on the left hand side going towards Pawtucketville.

P: Oh, I know! Yah I think I know.

E: It's down low. (P: Yah) And that was another one of the gate houses. And the people that worked for the canals, the Locks and Canals, they lived in those houses free of charge and get their pay, you know, every week.

P: I guess that's all I can think of. I wish (--) I'm sure there are other things we haven't talked about, but I forget. [All laugh] So, maybe if there's another (--) If when they listen to it, if they want to ask any other questions, maybe I'll come back and ask you some questions.

E: They'd probably ask us how we made the moonshine. [Laughs]

P: They may want to know. I never knew it could be done, what they use raisins for.

E: The raisins, yeast cakes. I don't remember, there was quite a lot of stuff they use to put in it, and they use to let it ferment. It was only a small little thing. The little Portuguese man that made it, his name was John (Flowers). I remember that! It was made of copper and it come like this, and like a funnel on the top. And that was all like sealed in. And then there was like, the thing was a coil. Oh, and it just twisted around, and round and went down and into the bottle. Then you put a fire underneath this and the steam would form the alcohol and would come down, drops, drops in the bottle.

P: Everyone would be happy! [All laugh]

E: No, we never drank. My father would take it because he had a bad heart, and you couldn't buy it. But sometimes I'd see, the gas man or somebody, he say, "Oh God, there's the gas man. He'll see the still." We'd go downstairs, put the gas off, put a blanket up so he wouldn't see the still. [All laugh] Of course some of them (--) Of course some of them I suppose (--) Of course plenty of them did sell it, but he never did, he just made it for his own use, or anybody, any of the Harps would come in, they would have a drink you know?

P: The Harps?

E: The Irish. They call them Harps. (Laughs) They'd come in and they'd give them a drink.

P: What does that name mean?

E: Well I suppose cause they always played the harp! I don't know why, but they always called them the harps. They call the English the Lymies.

P: Yah, for what reason? Do you know what reason?

E: Johnny Bolt.

P: You don't know the cause of those names?

E: No I don't. There's a place in England. Isn't it Limestone or something? And I think it's the part of England that they come from. Some of them have you know, the cockney English. (P: Umhm) And I, I think that (--)

P: The south, yah the southern. I think the South have that, South London.

E: Yah I don't know what it is, but they (--)

P: Not South London, Southern England, but I mean I don't know it that well. Well I guess that's all for today! So thank you very much!

E: Okay. You can find your way out of here, right?

[Tape ends, but begins again shortly after. It appears that part two was taped over part one. So the end of part one now begins with Paul in mid-sentence]

P: ... for voting. Were they promised something to vote?

E: I don't think so. It wasn't like today. And I don't even remember welfare. They had some sort of welfare, that when anybody got welfare there was a store open in Centraville, I think it was Centraville, and they would give them the order and it would be delivered to their house. I don't think any money ever passed hands. I don't think that the people that did get that kind of aid ever received any money. But I knew a woman that received that aid, and she said at noontime the inspectors, they'd come up from the welfare and looked to see if she had cake on the table. And then they'd go in and look at her beds to see if she had bed bugs. Pull up the clothes to see that her beds were clean.

P: Meaning if there was cake on the table, that she was too rich?

E: They weren't allowed to have that with welfare, with getting the welfare.

P: What could they have? It couldn't have been that expensive.

E: I don't even (--) You know what I mean, there was very few, (P: Yah) unless she made it herself you know, but I don't ever remember bought cakes. I don't even remember much of canned vegetables until the A & P's came in. And I was quite big when the first A & P came into Lowell. And we thought that was great! That's why everybody done like their own canning, because there just wasn't those things in the stores. Neither was there ready made clothes years and years ago. Pollard's, there was a Pollard's. I think I heard my mother say Pollard's was there, and you bought cloth by the yard and everybody made their own clothes.

P: I just learned how to crochet this morning.

E: Oh! [Laughing]

P: Someone was (--) This one person, I always noticed her crocheting, and I wanted to learn how to do it. So it's quite difficult. Well it's not too difficult, I imagine, it seems enjoyable, but it's hard to get that action.

E: Are you going to make an afghan?

P: No. I don't know. I don't think so. I'm just learning how to make lines, you know, loops of lines. (E: Laughing) Did you have a lot of land to grow vegetables on? (E: No) So how could you have many vegetables.

E: My father had a piece of land out on West Meadow Road, way out in Pawtucketville. And we'd walk out there, and he'd plant potatoes, and we'd have to go out and pick the potato bugs off. [Both laugh] Yah.

P: Was that end of Textile paved yet?

E: Ah, yes it was paved. Um, yah, because it was (--) Course there's more horse and teams at that time than there was automobiles.

P: What kinds of people would (--) Who were the sparrow men, who were these people? The poor?

E: No, they were people who worked for the city. That was their job.

P: And there probably (--) Was there any trash collecting?

E: Ah, yes there was. (P: Really?) Horse and Team, and big opened truck. And then, like in the wintertime there's no snow removal. They would plow the streets for the horse. And it was made like a V, you know, and the horses would pull it. And that's all it was. And we'd be banked up so much on each side, that I remember being small and my mother wouldn't let us out of the house, she was afraid.

P: You'd probably slide down the bank(--).

E: No, that something would happen you know, you'd get stuck in the snow and you wouldn't be able to get in. No, there wasn't um (--).

P: There mustn't have been that much trash to pick up for individual houses, because you didn't throw things away as much.

E: No, and then the Rendering Works use to send a horse and team around, and they would have soft soap and bar, yellow soap. And you gave them your bones, like pork chop bones and things like that, and fat, and they'd give you a bar of soap for it.

P: That must mean that's how they made their soap!

E: Yah, that's how they made it over the Rendering Works.

P: The what? What was the name?

E: The Rendering Works.

P: It mustn't be there.

E: It's still there! Right there next to Raytheon at the end of Woburn Street.

Unknown voice: They make fertilizer now.

E: They make fertilizer now.

P: Oh, I don't think I know. I don't even know where Raytheon is in this city.

E: Yah, it's over, not too far over.

P: I've lived here all my life, but I'm still not sure of how the ah (--)

E: What part of the city do you come from?

P: Well see I live in Pawtucketville. A lot of the French, (E: yes) after they left the Little Canada, (E: yes) moved to Pawtucketville let's say, or Centraville.

E: Mostly Pawtucketville.

P: That side of the river, yah, right. And so that's where I've lived all my life. And for some reason I developed a very narrow tunnel vision. Well my mother was the same thing. She wouldn't let me, she sort of marked off streets, like a square, not quite our neighborhood, but I couldn't walk outside the square. So I always maintained that sort of a view to the city, that anything on the other side of the river was, I don't know. I just (--)

E: Well see, when we were small we weren't let, we had to stay on Clare Street, but we had a big field, the Canal Field they called it, in back. And we could go down the field and play, but we weren't let off the street.

P: And you'd play with anyone in the neighborhood?

E: Anyone.

P: It didn't matter what their ethnic ...

E: No, no. There was no ethnic. There was all Irish.

P: It was all Irish there?

E: It was all Irish.

P: I know (--) It must (--) That happened then, later on other groups must have moved into the Acre.

E: Um, the first ones that moved in were the ah, we had a couple of French ones, French people that moved in there. Their name was Mr. Jordan. And then the Christos, the Greeks come in there. They're the ones that, they went over the bridge and seven of them were killed.

P: How did they do that?

E: They didn't make the curb. They were going pretty fast and over the bridge they went. And then the Macheras's, you know the ones that own the filling station? (P: um) Well they were the next ones that moved into there.

P: Did the Greeks settle anywhere else in the city first?

E: They were on Dummer Street. Then they'd come in to the, when the Irish was leaving the Acre, the Greeks came into the Acre.

P: Where were the Irish going?

E: Well they come up mostly upper Broadway, and up towards the Highlands. (P: That's when the) They were scattered. You know, they grow up and scattered everywhere in the city.

P: As people became more successful, they move out sort of .

E: But everybody kept their houses up in the Acre. All their gardens and houses really kept clean, and everything was very nice. When the Greeks moved in they done the very same thing. Everything was just perfect.

P: It's probably, could be related to the kind of culture they had in their homeland too.

E: That's right!

P: Because I think in their homeland they were also concerned about keeping things clean, because of disease for one thing.

E: Everybody took pride in their homes and their yards. They all had flowers and (--)

P: What kind of flower did you know....

E: Dahlias.

P: Really? They must have died, they died every winter?

E: Yup, Dahlias and Hollyhocks.

P: Yah, I've seen those (E: Yah). Now Hollyhocks are perennials, year round. (E: Yah) But the dahlias, what (--)

E: You'd have to dig up the bulb and replant them every year.

P: They're bulbs? They must have seeds?

E: I don't know. I never see them anymore. Like zinnias and things like that, I don't ever remember any flowers like that. We use to have a fern ah, they called it McKinley's Plume, and I've never seen this since I was a kid. I suppose McKinley must have had a plume in his hat. You know, the president?

P: Oh yah!

E: And that's what it was named after, but it was very, a delicate fern like, and they called it McKinley's Plume.

P: Had like, had fine leaves?

E: No, it was almost like a Boston Fern, only it was much more delicate fern, and it grew in the yards you know?

P: Wild!

E: No, I think it was planted. No, I think they planted it.

P: Where would you go to buy your seeds or plants and bulbs?

E: Um, there was a place (--)

**Side A ends
Side B begins**

E: ...store down on, I think it was Palmer Street. (P: Oh) And it was Palm Grain. That's what it was, Palm Grain. And they use to have a woman, and she use to load up them big bags of grain. Boy, she'd come out with one on each shoulder. And they'd let us take the horse home at night, because she took such good care of it, and she worked there for years and years. Yah, Palm Grain.

P: Where did you buy your groceries?

E: You know Saunder's had a big market and it was somewhere up around the South Common. And you'd go up there and buy a load of groceries. But you know, you had a garden in the summertime. So you had no heat in the cellar. So you could store potatoes there all winter. And two barrels of apples my father would buy. We always had chickens. And at that time they use to (--) There was something that they use to preserve the eggs in, glass water. And you could put the eggs in there and they would keep.

P: What was that, glass water?

E: I think they called it glass water. And you'd put them in a crock, and you'd put all these eggs in there. You couldn't fry them, but you could boil them and use them in a cake, but they wouldn't go bad. If you had too many eggs from your chickens that was a way of preserving them. Because we had ice, you know, we had to go out and buy it from the team, and buy your ice. (P: umhm) And we use to skate on the river. You'd skate from, well the boat, it use to be the boathouse. You could go up as far as Tyng's Island on the river. And then Daniel Gage had the, well it was right along by the river. And they had all the teams, and they use to deliver the ice. And when they'd be cutting ice they'd bring them big teams out on the ice with two horses, and cut the ice in the middle of the river.

P: So that's how they (--)

E: That's how thick the ice used to be then.

P: It's not like that anymore. (E: No.) I wonder why?

E: I don't know.

P: I never noticed that. Now that's (--) I didn't know where they got the ice. This is the first time I've heard that.

E: No, they got it on the river, and we would be skating and they'd be cutting the ice.

P: So the water couldn't have been that bad then, the river water?

E: But it didn't kill us. It was probably just as bad, we didn't even know. But I don't imagine the chemicals were in it that's in it today, you know, from the different industries that empty into the river. And probably that's another reason that it don't freeze up like it use to. Because we'd be skating before Christmas, it'd be that cold.

P: Yah. How come you couldn't swim, I mean skate past Tyngs Island?

E: It wouldn't (--) Well you'd be coming down towards the falls. Well it'd be just too far, you know. And then you couldn't come down any lower you'd be at the falls.

P: In (--) During, this is sort of under [unclear], but during prohibition did your father or anyone you knew have any sort of stills?

E: Yah we had a little still in the cellar. [Both laugh] Yah, we'd make about a quart of the (--) No, it wasn't to sell or anything. My father had bad heart problem. And the thing held about, oh I don't know, it was just about that high. It was a small little thing. You had to put raisins in, yeast in.

P: Raisins? What would the raisins be for?

E: I don't know. They even put tobacco in it, that was suppose to clear it or something. And then you'd boil it, and the steam would go all through that thing and down, and you'd see a little bit in the bottle. [Both laugh]

P: So do you think that was a pretty common occurrence, people doing that?

E: I think yah, a lot of people did it.

P: Even though, was it illegal?

E: Sure!

P: Wouldn't someone (--) Wouldn't you be afraid of someone reporting?

E: Um, nobody sold it. If anybody made it they made it for their own, for their own use.

P: So your father used (--) Do you think (--) Did he use apples to ferment it, or grapes?

E: Um, yah, it was apples. I know there was apples, and I don't remember. I know they'd ferment it and let it cook, but he'd probably make about two quarts a year was all.

P: Let's see. Now I imagine you went to church every (--)

E: Every Sunday. Made the missions. Had to go to Sunday school every Sunday afternoon.

P: Well does that mean you didn't go to a Catholic School?

E: No, I went to the Bartlett Training School, because the Bartlett School was at the end of the street. My mother couldn't see any sense in us going way down to St. Patrick's School in the middle of the winter. We had to walk all them places you know, and it was cold. So most of the kids up on our street went to the Bartlett School.

P: So it wasn't as if there weren't any Irish there in the classes?

E: It was all Irish in the classes. They all didn't go to the Sister's School, because it was quite a hike down there, you know? And most of them went to the Bartlett School that lived up around there.

P: Where did the other ethnic groups go to school?

E: To the Bartlett School. Everybody in together.

P: And how about the people who are Yankees, where would they go?

E: They went to the Bartlett School too.

P: So you all met one another then? But there weren't any fights between you?

E: No, never. Did you know the Bourgeois?

P: I've heard of them.

E: Yah, they always had money. They all went to the Bartlett School.

P: What would you do on a Saturday night let's say, or a Friday night? Did you ever go to an amusement park, or (--)

E: Yah, down to the lake.

P: You went to the lake?

E: Out to the lake. They had bobby horses, and a little roller coaster. You could run up and down, it was so, you know, you could almost reach the top of it with your hands, that's how high it was. [Paul laughs] When my mother come from Ireland she went on there. She said, "That was the worst thing I ever was on. As long as I live, I'll never go on that again!" [Laughing] It wasn't even as high as this ceiling.

P: How did you get over there? By car? By trolley?

E: By the yah, by the trolley. They use to run out to Lakeview. You know when you got down the corner they'd have to get up and change the switches, the thing. There was a wire that went along, (P: electric wire) electric wire, and they'd have to take it and change it over. And in the summer it was opened. The seats would go this way.

P: So how much did it cost then?

E: Ten cents. And the shows cost a nickel. And when it went up to six cents, my mother said, "We couldn't go anymore."

P: And you didn't go?

E: We went, but we didn't go as often as we use to. [Both laughing] At the Royal and the Jewel.

P: Did they show the same kind of films?

E: Ah, yah. They use to have serials. You know, you'd go Saturdays and they'd probably be on for about ten weeks.

P: So if you missed one show you'd have to go to the next?

E: Well you'd miss it. You just missed it, that was all.

P: They didn't replay it?

E: No, no, no, nothing like that.

P: Did you have a certain time you had to be in every night?

E: Eight o'clock.

P: Even in the summer when it would have been daylight more?

E: They didn't have Daylight Saving Time then. No, my father and mother both worked hard, and when they went to bed early, we all went to bed early. You know, you played out in the street with the kids, but very few of them stayed out late at night. All the people around there worked in the mills, and they all worked hard.

P: And did your parents expect a lot from you in school to do well?

E: Well you know, they expected us to do as good as we could. (P: um) I mean they didn't force us into anything, or anything like that.

P: Did you go to high school?

E: Ah huh, two years

P: Then you had to leave, or (--)

E: No, I hurt myself and so I had lost a lot of time. So I didn't want to go back. And so I didn't want to go back. I had lost too much time. So I went to work. I wasn't crazy about school to begin with.

Unknown voice: Oh! You never told me that before.

P: Why was that?

E: I don't know. I just wanted to get out and work.

P: Yah, your parents probably expected you (--) Well did they expect you to work? Or would they have rather see you stay on?

E: No, we could go to school if we wanted to, you know. They never pushed us to work.
(P: What high school was) At that time we could have gone to work at fourteen.

P: But you would have had to tell them that you were sixteen.

E: No, you could work at fourteen. You'd work and you'd have to go to school one half a day a week, until you were sixteen, but we never did. We went, I was past sixteen when I went to work.

P: And where did you work?

E: Mohair, Mass Mohair.

P: And doing, you were doing (--)

E: Mill work, you know, doff and spinning. It isn't hard. Like you know they say, "Oh the mills were terrible." It wasn't, it was nice working there!

P: Wasn't it warm though?

E: Well it was not, you know, I mean there was always loads of windows, the windows was always open. It was all young girls like myself, and we used to have a lot of fun and a lot of good time. At that time we'd have eleven doffers. They'd be five on each side and the boss doffer. And we would probably only have to doff like nineteen bobbins, which was nothing. Then they bought the (--) Then later on, years to come, they brought in efficiency men. Now you had two doffers and that was all.

P: So they make you work a lot harder?

E: Well I mean, it was ah (--) Even now in the mills they have to doff their own frames, and spin and do all the rest of it. It was much easier years ago, much, much easier. It was about the best paying mill in the city, because whatever the others got we always got. It was a family, Bliss, that owned the mill. You know, it wasn't a big corporation. (P: yah) And ah, it was very, it was nice working there.

[Recorder is turned off, then on again]

P: So you were saying you worked at Mohair, and then you worked someplace else afterwards.

E: Afterwards, yah. (Molly?) Worsted.

P: Worsted, where was that?

E: On Perkins Street.

P: Do you happen to know who the owners were?

E: His name was um (--) Isn't it awful, I can't remember his name. Chew. (P: Chew?) Chew. I couldn't think of his name for a minute, yah. His name was Chew, yah. [Cockereth] used to own it first, and then took him as a partner. Then Mr. Cockereth died. Then he gave, he left it to (--) Then he retired and gave it to his son, and the son put the finishing touches to it.

P: [Laughing] He didn't care about it that much?

E: Well he got to important for his own good.

P: Hm. How many years did you work there?

E: Oh, about fifteen years.

P: So you were working while you were married? (E: Yes) Was that unusual?

E: Well years ago women never worked. Like when I was growing up the women never worked, because everybody worked very hard in their own homes. They had to make all the clothes for the kids, done all the cooking, did all of the canning. You couldn't go to the store and buy all those things. Only thing you didn't have was a cow. But I went to work. My husband took sick, so I went to work.

P: Oh yah, where did you meet your husband?

E: He come for the Acre.

P: So you knew each other as kids? Children?

E: Yup!

P: Did your parents approve of your marriage? (E: Yah) Even though he was Italian it didn't matter?

E: Well they'd had been happier if he was Irish, but he wasn't. [Laughs]

P: Did they ever express any misgivings about that kind (--)

E: No. No, My parents weren't the least prejudice about people. They took everybody at face value.

P: They knew the language. Your husband knew English?

E: Ah huh, oh yah.

P: It wasn't, there wasn't any language barrier?

E: No.

P: The church didn't mind? (E: No) Because they were both Catholic.

E: They were all Catholics. He was born in this country. He was born in Boston.

P: Then he came to Lowell?

E: And then they came to Lowell. The father was a tailor.

P: That's probably something he picked up somewhere else.

E: No, he had a big tailor shop. (P: Here?) Made men's suits and...

P: Did he ever make anything for you, or?

E: No, he died when they were very young, but his mother was a good dressmaker. She made loads of clothes.

P: So what year did you get married?

E: Oh, about 1924.

P: Do you remember where you went for a honeymoon?

E: No, just to Boston.

P: You don't remember where you went in Boston?

E: No, too long ago. I don't remember. [Laughs] Yah!

P: Did you spend most of your life here in Lowell, or did you travel around?

E: Oh we lived in Canada for awhile, and in Maine.

P: Where did you live in those places?

E: Quebec City in Canada, and Portland, Maine.

P: What was your husband doing there when you (--)

E: They use to have a company, Freddie's Donuts, and they started up a place in Canada. So that's where we went to start it up. And they started up another place in Maine, so we went there.

P: So is that what your husband did for awhile?

E: Yah, that's what he done for awhile.

P: Were you saying he worked in the mills too?

E: No, he never worked in the mills. No, he worked in... there use to be Willis's Market down in the Square, and he worked in Willis's Market for years and years. Then he worked for Canada Dry.

P: Did you get your food that you needed from Willis's? (E: No?) Did, even though, did your husband work there though during that time, or (--)

E: I wasn't married to him when he worked there. We had a Market on Broadway, McCarty's Market. And that's where you'd buy your meat. They didn't sell many groceries there, it was mostly meat, meat market.

P: Were there more than one meat market store? (E: umhm) Did some have better meats than others?

E: I don't think so. I don't think so. We had three right around there. There was Sullivan, McCarty and Donohue. Mike Donahue had a place. And of course there was a couple of barrooms around there too along with them. They use to go down and get a can of beer, the women. They had the can underneath their arm, and the shawl over them [Laughs], and they drank the can of beer.

P: Were women allowed to drink in public, or?

E: No, but they'd have a little, well it was like a little (--) Something in the wall, and they'd just put the can in, and the bartender would fill it up and put it out. They wouldn't go in the barroom at all. [Unclear]

P: Was that only for men then, the barrooms?

E: Only the men went in the barrooms.

P: Um, I wonder why that was?

E: Of course later on they use to have it, but the women never went in the barrooms. I don't know whether they were allowed in there, or whether the owners wouldn't let them in. I don't know that there was any law against them going in. I just think that the owners didn't want them in there.

P: I was just thinking of something. I probably lost it.

E: There wasn't too many Protestants around where we lived. They had (--) Although there was some. We all played together, there was never no problems with them. We had Seven Day Advents and (--)

P: Episcopalian? Lutherans?

E: St. Anne's Church.

P: I think they're Episcopalian. I don't know if they're Lutheran or Episcopalian, St. Anne's. Episcopalian?

E: I think maybe they are. Um, (--)

P: That would be English then, German English.

E: They all belong to there. It isn't too different from the Catholic Church, St. Anne's Church.

P: No, and the services aren't that different either. (E: no) Did you have a chance, did you ever visit any of the other churches in the area?

E: Once a year. You know there was a day you were suppose to visit seven churches, and we'd go around and visit the seven churches.

P: I never knew that. I didn't know that existed.

E: Oh yah, years ago! Did you remember that? Was it seven churches? (Background voice- I remember [unclear]) Sure, seven churches. They'd have to be Catholic churches.

P: [Laughs] Oh, I thought it was seven different...

E: No, no, seven Catholic churches you'd have to go, because you wouldn't... outside of that you'd get no blessings if you didn't.

P: Well who would know if you visited them?

E: Your conscience. [Laughs] We use to go to St. Anne's Church and pretend we thought it was a Catholic Church. [Both laugh] And we'd go up to St. Jean's. Of course it was all French there. And we learned two or three words in French. "Je nai pa comprehension". And that's all we knew. And if anybody would say anything to us, that's what we'd say. [Laughs] Is that I don't understand French?

P: It'd be, "Je ne comprand pas Francais".

E: [Laughing] Whatever. Whatever way we said it, (P: They understood it) they understood enough not to say nothing else to us.

P: Well you had it all right. You had all the right words. (E: Yes) Just not in the right order. [Laughs]

E: Not in the right way.

P: You wouldn't be able to eat anything Saturday nights before you went?

E: No, then you had to go to Confession Saturday afternoon. And you'd go (--) You could have your supper, but then you couldn't eat anything the rest of the night, or early in the morning. Not like today.

P: Well what did you think would happen to you if you ate?

E: Well that was the way we were taught in church, you didn't eat anything after twelve o'clock, after twelve o'clock at night. You didn't even take a drink of water.

P: They never gave you any reasons for this, or you never thought (--)

E: Well you fasted for (--)

Unknown voice: It's just a sacrifice.

E: For what?

Unknown voice: It's just a sacrifice.

E: A sacrifice. And they'd have a mission, and we'd have to go to the mission.

P: No one (--) What do you mean by mission?

E: Priests would come from other sections of the country and they'd have a mission for a week. And you'd have to go every night and every morning. I know, are there? Yah, I know. Every night, and ah, they were very strict the priests at that time. (P: um) Very very strict.

P: Mostly Irish?

E: Irish, we had all Irish at the St Patrick's church. That was the first church in Lowell, first Catholic Church.

P: Why were the priests strict, in what way?

E: I don't know, they had more control over the kids than what they have today. You wouldn't dare sass your mother back, or (--)

P: And your parents probably liked the priests to be strict?

E: And the priest would come around and visit the houses around. The nuns would come once a year, and for food or clothing or something. The Sisters of Charity. (P: Unclear) And they would come (unclear).

P: Now they were typically French teachers?

E: The Sisters of Charity? (P: Yes) These weren't, but they could have been. Little sisters of the Poor, (P: Yah) that's what they were.

P: That's right. There it doesn't matter. (E: it doesn't matter) Sisters of Charity are from Ottawa, and so they were usually French.

E: Yah, it was the Little Sisters of the Poor. And she would, they would come around and you'd give them clothes. And then whatever we ever, ever out grew, we went up to the orphanage. St. Peter's had an orphanage.

P: St. Peter's?

E: Yes. That was up in the Highlands. I think it's a school up there now. (Unknown voice: [Unclear]) Oh yes! You know, years ago they had the kids up in St. Peter's Orphanage. Well on one day a year they'd bring some of them kids to St. Patrick's church, and they'd be down the basement in the back where the organ is, and you could go down and adopt one of them kids and take it home with you. It was terrible! When I think of it now, it was just terrible. I mean the poor kids use to be standing there. (Asking someone else in the room) Do you remember that? Well I think St. Patrick's church was the only church that did it. And those kids would all be standing in back of the church, and I

know two or three people that adopted kids, took them home with them and kept them. A lot of them who were in St. Peter's had nobody. They were like abandon children.

P: Hm. I wonder, the parents just couldn't afford to raise them?

E: I don't know, I don't know.

P: I wonder if, if they were, yah, if they were born out of wedlock, if that might have been a problem for people to have children if they weren't married then? Do you think that? See, like today obviously it doesn't matter (E: No), it doesn't seem to matter.

E: But years ago if you had a baby and you weren't married, course this is a good many years ago, before you could come back into the church, you had to go up before the Congregation and ask their forgiveness.

P: That must have been humiliating?

E: I never knew it in my time, but when I went to work in the mill a woman that was there was talking about it one day, and she was telling us about it.

(Tape shuts off and begins again with "E" in mid-sentence)

E: Central Street, and they'd have plays there all the time. And I can remember my mother saying Kate Burningham got shot on the stage up there. I never heard anybody else say about it, but I use to hear them talk about Kate Burningham getting shot on the stage up the old Opera House.

P: Um, who was this lady, Kate?

E: She was one of the actresses evidently on the stage up there.

P: And she died on stage?

E: Yah, evidently she did.

P: They never knew what caused it?

E: That's as much as I ever heard them talk about it. But it was there for a good many years! Different actors would come and they'd stay the whole season. And they had very good plays up there. There use to be quite a few. B.F. Keith's was here too. That was on Bridge Street, Merrimack Theater.

P: Hm. How much did the theater cost?

E: Thirty-five cents.

P: Oh, so that was more expensive?

E: That was more expensive. We couldn't go there till we went to work. [Both laugh]

P: After work did you ever go out with some of your work ... your friends?

E: Oh yes! We use to go out. We use to go out and have a good time. We use to go to the beach, and you'd pay two dollars and you'd ride the back of a truck.

P: Which beach is this?

E: Revere, and you'd ride in the back of a truck. They'd put benches there, and for \$2.00 everybody would go and have a very good time. They had (--) You know lots of ... lots and lots of things they use to have at Revere Beach.

P: No one use to go to Hampton Beach, (E: No!) or ?

E: No, all the amusements was at Revere Beach. Everything you could think of was there. You'd have a fun day there! Some of the things would almost kill yah, but you'd enjoy it just the same. [Laughs] There was one thing they called the pit. And you'd go in it. You'd be walking along and all of a sudden the floor gives away, you'd go sliding down. And once you went through, you'd have to go through the whole thing! You'd be almost dead by the time you'd come out. [Laughing] You'd think you had a good time, but you would hardly be able to walk.

P: What time did you come home for?

E: We had to be in by 10:00 even though we worked.

P: Your parents became easier eventually then with you?

E: Well yah, but very, you know, you go to the show you get out around 10:00 and then most everybody would go right home. You know we walked everywhere we went, because we didn't have the car. And you wouldn't bother waiting for the trolley or the bus, or whatever you were going to do, you'd walk downtown. Everybody went downtown on Saturday night. (Repeat) Everybody went downtown on Saturday night. There wasn't much down there. [Laughs] We used to go in and out the stores. And the men would stand outside the stores waiting for their wives, and that seemed to be the big thrill of the week.

P: What kind of holidays did you look forward to?

E: Just Christmas.

P: Not St. Patrick's Day, or?

E: Oh gosh yah, St. Patrick's Day too!

P: Did you do anything special with your family?

E: No, but lots of the houses you'd have parties on St. Patrick's Day. They'd do the Irish jig and things like that.

P: Would there be any drinking?

E: Always, [Laughs] and lots of drunks. Best times was at the wakes and St. Patrick's Day. We use to have great times at the wakes too! (P: Laughs)

P: I heard once that people wouldn't work on St. Patrick's Day, the Irish wouldn't at least.

E: They use to have a parade, and it use to start in the Acre, St. Patrick's Church. And there was an old man, nobody ever knew where he came from, they called him "Happy Days Casey". And he had a long white beard and long white hair, and he had a white horse, and he'd always lead the parade. He was a character! I don't know where he ever come from and... (P: Where he went!) Yah, he died. He got killed in the car. Then his horse took very sick and died, and his sister died. And they said, you know, too bad about your sister. And he said, "I felt much worse when my horse died." (Both laugh) He use to sleep right in the barn with him.

P: Would this be the stalls? Well did everyone have a horse of their own?

E: A lot of people had horses, and horses and buggies.

P: And they kept it near their houses?

E: Well not around where we lived, but you know, in the outskirts. You'd see them downtown with them. My mother use to trade with a man, his name was Russell. And he use to have a grocery store on Branch Street. And he would come every week to take the order, because we had, she had big orders, cause she'd order flour by the barrel, butter by the ton. You know, because we had the boarders and she was always cooking. And he use to have, you've heard of the surrey with the fringe on top? I can remember the (--)

Interview ends